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ABSTRACT

A one-page introduction is followed by summaries of articles and documents on teacher competency testing. George F. Madaus argues that, although tests serve some useful functions, treating them as a major mechanism for reforming education is questionable. Peter A. Garcia examines the negative impact of testing on minority teachers and minorities attempting to enter educational training programs in Texas. Gregory R. Anrig notes that tests have a legitimate even though limited function and urges policymakers to ensure their proper use. In reviewing legal issues, Joseph C. Beckham focuses on constraints courts have imposed on teacher competency testing. Procedures used to validate the National Teacher Examinations as accurate measures of competency are discussed by Lawrence H. Cross. The final selection summarizes positions taken by the two leading teacher unions in two journal articles, one by Rita Hodgkins and Bernard McKenna and the other by Albert Shanker and Gordon Ward. Although differing over the use of tests, they agree that teacher competency needs to be assessed. (CJH)

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Teacher Testing

Judy Dunn, Margarita Donnelly, Stuart C. Smith, and Richard J. Rankin

Along with the educational reform movement has come a renewed interest in monitoring the competence of teachers. State legislators and school administrators, responding to a national surge to strengthen the schools, have turned to testing as a means of ensuring that the educational system is staffed by competent professionals.

Within the current decade, mandated testing of teachers has become a national trend that now involves thirty-eight states, with more on the way. Tests are used to screen would-be teachers for entrance into teacher education programs, to certify teachers at the end of their training, to periodically recertify teachers, and to qualify teachers for advancement in career ladder or merit pay programs.

The most commonly used tests—twenty-five states administer one or more of them—are the National Teacher Examinations (NTE) developed by Educational Testing Service (ETS); they include tests in basic skills, general knowledge, and knowledge of pedagogy.

It is generally accepted that teachers need to combine a broad, basic education with mastery of the particular subject matter they are responsible for teaching. However, educational researchers have had little luck in finding a dependable, reliable, and still reasonably fast way of evaluating a teacher's competence. Moreover, mastery of subject matter clearly does not guarantee teacher competence. On the other hand, that is the aspect of the situation that can most readily be measured. Many educators thus have good reason to be concerned that too much credence be given to tests.

No standardized test, researchers point out, can measure such qualities as motivation, dedication, caring, and sensitivity. Thus decisions about a prospective teacher's career need to be based on multiple criteria; no one should be denied entrance to a profession solely on the basis of a written examination.

George F. Madaus argues that, although tests can serve some useful functions, treating them as a major mechanism for reforming American education is highly questionable. The negative impact of testing on minority teachers is examined by Peter Garcia, who shows that the use of tests with specified cut-off scores has the effect of denying disproportionate numbers of minorities entry to educational training programs.

Gregory R. Anrig notes that tests have a legitimate even though limited function and urges policy makers to ensure that proper use is made of them. In reviewing legal issues, Joseph C. Beckham focuses on the constraints courts have imposed on teacher competency testing. Procedures used to validate tests as accurate measures of teacher competency are discussed by Lawrence H. Cross.

The final entry summarizes the positions taken by the two leading teacher unions. Although differing over the use of teacher tests, they agree that teacher competency needs to be assessed.

It has been stated that teaching is neither an art nor a science but a talent (J.M. Stephens, *The Process of Schooling*, 1967). Finding talent is an expensive and sometimes elusive search. Experience and observation make it clear that some teachers do not belong in the classroom because of lack of basic skills. Others may possess the necessary knowledge but are handicapped by an absence of motivation or lack of understanding of students. Because measuring the former group is easier, less costly, and thus more alluring than the latter, educators may rightly fear that expedience will impel school policy makers in some dubious directions and make teacher testing just another school problem rather than a useful instrument.

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1 **Madaus, George F.** "Public Policy and the Testing Profession: You've Never Had It So Good?" *Educational Measurement: Issues and Practice* 4.4 (Winter 1985), pp. 5-11. EJ 327 438.

Many policy makers regard testing as an essential tool in identifying what is wrong with the nation's educational system. Madaus, director of the Center for the Study of Testing, Evaluation, and Educational Policy at Boston College, takes the position that tests are being burdened with too much responsibility.

In reviewing the history of the uses of standardized tests in American education, Madaus points out that policy makers in the midseventies discovered that the sanctions and rewards attached to test results make them a useful administrative mechanism for implementing various strategies. For example, test results were used to meet a consumer demand for credentialing, to transfer control of curriculum and graduation standards from local school systems to state departments of education, and to reassure a nervous public that action was being taken to make things better.

Tests thus acquired a symbolic value. Today performance on mandated tests is fast becoming a synonym for merit within our educational system.

When policy makers mandate tests for decisions about graduation, promotion, or merit pay increases, they are legislating testing as a primary motivating power in the educational process. Because testing concentrates attention on the skills most amenable to measurement, the emphasis on testing narrows the curriculum and constrains the creativity of teachers and students.

For decades, Madaus notes, test users have been warned never to use a single test score when making important decisions about students. Today this tradition, with its healthy suspicion of psychometric indicators, is eroding in the face of policy demands. Schools may in fact use multiple criteria in deciding on a teacher's certification, but when the test score is made a necessary condition that can override all other considerations, then it has become an infallible arbiter. Policy makers no longer trust other indicators, or need to.

Madaus proposes the establishment of an independent auditing agency that would evaluate tests and testing programs. At the very least such an agency could address the concerns of aggrieved examinees. He concludes by asking the educational community to question measurement-driven instruction, reassert the fallibility of numbers, and question the impact of the requirement process on test construction and validation.

2 **Garcia, Peter A.** *A Study on Teacher Competency Testing and Test Validity with Implications for Minorities and the Results and Implications of the Use of the Pre-Professional Skills Test (PPST) as a Screening Device for Entrance into Teacher Education Programs in Texas.* Edinburg, Texas: Pan American University, March 1986, 140 pages. ED 270 389.

Concentrating upon the most recent literature, Garcia explores current trends and policies in the mandate to test prospective teachers from training program entry through exit and certification. He also reviews the major tests being used and critiques the validation process in use in Texas to support the PreProfessional Skills Test (developed by Educational Testing Service) for entrance to teacher education programs.

Because Garcia's views are similar to those of other authors reviewed, this summary focuses on his findings as to the effect teacher testing is having on ethnic minorities. That effect is clear: "Ethnic minorities are systematically being screened out of the teacher profession." The pass rates of ethnic minorities on tests for entry into teacher education programs, credentialing, and certification continue to restrict their entrance into teaching. Blacks and Hispanics are scoring from .5 to 1.5 standard deviations below the mean for whites.

Currently, the teaching profession is 87 percent white, 10 percent black, and 2 percent Hispanic, whereas minority representation among students in schools is over 25 percent (in some states close to 50 percent). Combined with declining minority representation in institutions of higher education, these rates are troubling.

Why do ethnic minorities fail these tests in disproportionate numbers? Most of them grow up in an environment substantially different in language and customs from the dominant culture, characterized by Western European values and sole use of English. The language patterns and cultural orientation of the tests, however,

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are normed to the dominant Anglo society. Also contributing to the high failure rate are high dropout rates, parental apathy, reduced classroom participation, lower academic expectations, and ineffective test-taking strategies.

Garcia makes several recommendations for ensuring fair and equal treatment of minorities who wish to enter teaching. Heading his list is the need to avoid "a single cut-off score on any examination" that would prevent a teacher's admission to teacher training, continuance in such training, or certification. Evaluation at each stage should be based on multiple criteria. "Decisions from cumulative evidence...over a period of time will result in the best teacher selection procedure."

Pointing out that members of ethnic minorities bring into the teaching profession particular language skills and cultural knowledge that "are not measured through standardized tests," Garcia recommends that testing mandates make provision for such teachers and for capitalizing on their talents.

3 **Anrig, Gregory R.** "Teacher Education and Teacher Testing: The Rush to Mandate." *Phi Delta Kappan* 67, 6 (February 1986), pp. 447-451. EJ 333 055.

There is a place for teacher tests in American education, says Anrig, president of the Educational Testing Service. "Properly developed and validated, teacher tests can measure the academic knowledge of prospective teachers." But, he adds, standardized tests cannot accurately measure the subjective qualities that go into making a good teacher. It is vital that policy makers admit the limits of tests and recognize that testing can measure only a sample of the knowledge and skills a teacher must possess.

Anrig warns that the rush to legislate "excellence" through teacher testing has in some cases led to decisions that are educationally unsound. For example, several states make "continued accreditation of teacher preparation programs dependent on the test performance of the prospective teachers they enroll." This requirement fails to recognize that 60 to 80 percent of the courses prospective teachers take are offered not in education departments but elsewhere in the college or university. Also of concern to Anrig is the possible imposition of requirements—as in Texas and Arkansas—that all practicing teachers pass a one-time test or lose their teaching certificates. No one wants "illiterate" teachers, he says, but this problem can best be addressed through careful evaluation and supervision of teachers.

Further, the effect of teacher testing on minorities may be devastating. Educational Testing Service data show that by the year 2000, if current trends are not reversed, "the percentage of minorities in the teaching force...could be cut almost in half." Over this same period the proportion of minority students is expected to increase dramatically.

On the encouraging side, Anrig points to data showing that the performance of minority students on tests such as the SAT has been improving. "Minority students are demonstrating that they can and will do better on standardized tests if they are provided better educational opportunities."

4 **Beckham, Joseph C.** "Objective Testing to Assess Teacher Competency: Emerging Legal Issues." In Jones, Thomas N., and Semler, Darel P. *School Law Update 1986*. Topeka, Kansas: National Organization on Legal Problems in Education, 1986. Pp. 145-158.

In reviewing the legal implications of teacher competency testing, Beckham points out that testing as a basis for certification has been "judicially upheld where the test focused on minimum standards of literacy and knowledge within a particular discipline or educational field." But where test scores have been used in teacher recertification, promotion, renewal, or other performance evaluation decisions, the courts have tended to require that other performance indicators be taken into account.

States and school districts using tests to evaluate teacher competence must be aware that "specification of the intended purpose for the test and elaboration and implementation of a validation strategy to realize that purpose are critical dimensions in withstanding legal challenge." The classification scheme must also be "reasonable and rationally related to a valid state purpose." States and districts also must clearly document their efforts to eliminate bias and to develop fair use of minimum score standards.

5 **Cross, Lawrence H.** "Validation of the NTE Tests for Certification Decisions." *Educational Measurement: Issues and Practice* 4,3 (Fall 1985), pp. 7-10. EJ 322 945.

Many of the states that require prospective teachers to be tested for certification are using the National Teacher Examinations (NTE). "Because the NTE tests were not specifically constructed as certification tests," says Cross, "any state wishing to use them for that purpose must conduct a state-wide validity study." If scores were to be used from NTE tests without validity studies, they could be challenged in the courts.

By fall of 1985, such validation studies had been conducted in eighteen states, their main objectives being to establish the validity of using scores for certification decisions and to set a minimum performance standard for the tests determined to be valid. Cross describes the basic approaches used to accomplish those objectives. Because all the methods for

establishing performance standards (cut-off scores) rely on subjective judgments about the items being evaluated, they have yielded standards that vary considerably.

During the thirty-five years that the NTE tests have been used, no definitive relationship has been established between the knowledge tested and the ability to teach effectively by those performing adequately on the tests.

Concludes Cross: "Some people will demonstrate acceptable performance on these tests and yet be incompetent in the classroom. Conversely, some who might perform adequately in selected teaching situations may not be able to demonstrate the level of knowledge judged acceptable for a member of a learned profession." He advises, therefore, against making tests the only eligibility standard for entrance to the teaching profession.

What position do organized teachers take on the issue of teacher testing? These two articles present the viewpoints of the National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers.

Hodgkins, a member of NEA's Board of Directors, and McKenna, the association's program development specialist, say "the NEA wants more, not less, and more rigorous evaluation of the readiness of those who aspire to teach." But they point out that the timing of assessments is all-important. Testing of basic skills and knowledge of liberal arts should take place before students enter teacher preparation programs and should be carried out by the arts and sciences departments that provide the instruction. Testing students "after they have completed a teaching specialty, professional studies, and a practicum is inappropriate, redundant, and wasteful."

Once students complete their teacher preparation programs, "no existing written assessment is accurate enough" for evaluating their readiness to teach. Single exit exams, say Hodgkins and McKenna, fail to measure the broad repertoire of knowledge and skills required for effective teaching.

What are the alternatives? Hodgkins and McKenna state that "a broad range of criteria and processes are available, some quite perfected, for assessing...the components of teacher education. They include objective referenced paper-and-pencil tests, observation, interviews, simulation, microteaching, self-evaluation, and expert panel judgment."

In contrast, Shanker, president of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), and Ward, AFT director of research, support the testing of entrants into the teaching field: "It is perfectly appropriate and desirable to test new entrants in the teaching field to ensure they meet minimum standards." The AFT also supports the testing of prospective teachers at the completion of their studies. "Colleges have different programs and different standards. A test would be valuable in ensuring that general standards are met."

While advocating the use of tests, Shanker and Ward concur with the NEA that "a test should never be the only criterion used to evaluate the competence of a teacher preparation candidate." Moreover, they oppose the testing of veteran teachers. "Mechanisms already exist," they say, "to remove veteran teachers with similar deficiencies."

6 Hodgkins, Rita, and McKenna, Bernard. "Testing and Teacher Certification: An Explosive Combination." And **Shanker, Albert, and Ward, Gordon.** "Teacher Competency and Testing: A Natural Affinity." *Educational Measurement: Issues and Practice* 1,2 (Summer 1982), pp. 10-12, 26, and pp. 6-9, 26. EJ 269 338 and 269 337.

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